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USSR-AFGHANISTAN: More Media Coverage

Increased attention by the Soviet media to Afghanistan probably reflects in part internal pressures for expanded coverage. []

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Since mid-December a series of articles have portrayed conditions in Afghanistan as difficult but improving. An authoritative editorial in *Pravda* on 2 January called the US the principal obstacle to a political settlement, and reiterated major elements of the USSR's position on the outlook for Afghanistan. Recent articles also have attacked China, Pakistan, the UK, West Germany, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Iran for allegedly aiding the resistance. []

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Two articles in *Red Star* have described in detail the heroism of Soviet personnel in defending against two separate insurgent attacks on a convoy and an airfield. One revealed in passing that the USSR has suffered seven more casualties. []

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Comment: The coverage is designed in part to counter the increased attention the Western press pays to Afghanistan on the anniversary of the invasion. In addition, Soviet journalists periodically claim they are under pressure from the public, particularly families of men serving in Afghanistan, to provide more information about the conditions faced by Soviet troops. A recent Soviet radiobroadcast acknowledged receiving "many" letters asking why Soviet soldiers are still in Afghanistan. []

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The articles in *Red Star* illustrate the gradual expansion since 1981 of the practice of acknowledging intermittently the involvement of Soviet troops in the fighting. These articles suggest the leadership may be under pressure from elements of the military establishment to give more coverage to the valor of Soviet soldiers. []

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The USSR's coverage of Afghanistan, however, is still circumscribed by Moscow's concern to limit internal and international attention to the conflict. Soviet media continue to paint an unrealistic picture of conditions in Afghanistan. []

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The revelation of seven additional casualties raises Moscow's public tally of its losses in Afghanistan to 19—seven killed and 12 wounded. []

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